

REPORT TO SECRETARY TAFT UPON CANAL CONDITIONS

The report to Secretary Taft on conditions of employment on the isthmus of Panama, which were investigated by Miss Gertrude Beeks, Secretary of the Welfare Department of the National Civic Federation, was made public today.

Nearly every feature of life on the isthmus is touched upon in the report. Many things are highly commended, others are condemned and recommendations are made for the betterment of conditions. The inspection covered camps, barracks, hospitals, mess halls, schools, club houses, commissaries, jails, churches, work places and transportation facilities. Conditions of employment were also investigated. Information was gathered from officials, superintendents, foremen, mechanics, clerks, nurses, doctors, secretaries of the Young Men's Christian Association, railroad engineers and conductors, their wives and children, and in fact every type of resident on the isthmus, the negroes included. But in no case was testimony sought or received from discharged employees.

It is clearly recognized that never before have there been such good conditions in American construction work, but in view of the climatic conditions, length of time to be consumed in the building of the Canal and the fact that the Government should be a model employer, it is urged that the surroundings of the employees should be made as comfortable as possible. Naturally, more can be expected from the Government than from a private employer with limited capital, and restricted by competitive conditions.

Some of the recommendations have already been adopted. Secretary Taft, immediately requested the Agricultural Department to start a Government farm and made arrangements with Secretary Wilson to have all food stuffs inspected before shipment from the United States; he also authorized the purchase of blankets for the negroes and refrigeration plants for mess halls. A tentative draft of the report was presented to Lieutenant-Colonel Goethals before Miss Beeks left the isthmus. He at once had plans drawn for the drying rooms, authorized the erection of rain sheds, and has since supplied beds for all Americans in permanent quarters and ordered that metal cots be covered with canvas. He has indicated his intention of putting into effect such suggestions as available funds will permit and of calling the more important recommendations to the attention of the Congressional Committee on Appropriations, which will visit the isthmus in October, with the view of securing funds for their adoption. The Commission also has started the publication of the Canal Zone newspaper and has accepted the services of a representative of the Welfare Department of the National Civic Federation—Miss Helen Varick Boswell—to organize women's clubs and she is now on the isthmus Canal Commission for comments, which will be published later. President Roosevelt has requested Miss Beeks to return to the Panama within eight months and report upon progress made.

Many of the complaints of employees with reference to housing, food, conditions of employment and the best service between the United States and Panama undoubtedly have been warranted, but the Chairman of the Commission and Chief Engineer, Lieutenant-Colonel Goethals, by making personal investigations affording for the first time an opportunity for grievances to be heard, and by making certain improvements, has inspired confidence.

The investigation covered a period of five weeks, from the time of leaving New York, June 7, until the return, July 12, twenty-three days having been spent on the isthmus.

The report in part follows:

Climate.

The casual visitor to the isthmus expecting to find only marshes is pleasantly surprised upon seeing the beautiful mountain scenery. The climate is more endurable than in many parts of the United States in summer.

During the rainy season, which extends over eight months, ending about the first of January, there are periods when it is clear, but there is a continual moisture which necessitates constant airing of bed clothing and woolen garments to prevent them from becoming musty. The dry season, which extends over four months, is described as most delightful.

The cool nights necessitate sleeping under blankets. The tropical light brings nervousness and energy is sapped, making annual vacations imperative for Americans. While an extensive residence of ordinary health precautions render a temporary stay upon the Canal Zone quite safe.

Conditions of Employment.

There are two sets of employees, those of the Isthmian Canal Commission and those of the Panama Railroad Company. The term "laborer" is applied to the common laborer, the American mechanics, clerks and others being designated as "employees." There are altogether forty thousand in the force on the isthmus—six thousand American employees and thirty-four thousand laborers who are West Indian negroes and Europeans. Our camps in the Canal Zone are located between the Panamanian cities of Colon and Panama, which are respectively on the Atlantic and Pacific coasts. There are seven American inter-vening camps for American and forty-six contiguous settlements for laborers. In the main villages there are postal stations, fire departments, telephone service, hand stands in front of the hotels and news stands at the railway stations.

"Things are improving right

along!" That sentence was heard constantly, as well as "There will be no kick coming as long as it can be seen that needed changes are being made."

Quarters Inadequate.

There are many manufacturing villages presenting an appearance so beautiful as the homes for American families and bachelors' dormitories. All have wide, screened verandas and modern plumbing. The interiors are artistic. The Government furnishes quarters, furniture an delight free to all. The married employees also receive free fuel. It was surprising to find beautiful mission and wicker furniture, although golden oak is sometimes supplied.

Two years ago it was common to be assigned an old French house without mosquito netting, without plumbing and with an attic containing bats and rats and all sorts of objectionable creatures which "had a merry round every night," and it was necessary to walk through jungle, coming in contact with it dangerous fungi and bugs. Bachelors were fortunate to have tents or quite uninhabitable quarters for which high prices were paid. Water for bathing cost forty to sixty cents a can; food contained maggots frequently and eggs had to be fried or scrambled because "it was not safe to boil them." The only music that was heard was "Lead, Kindly Light," played at the funeral of the unfortunate yellow fever victims.

Conditions have changed almost miraculously, but there are improvements yet to be made for health and comfort.

The Hotel Tivoli, a beautiful structure, is used by transient guests and by employees who cannot be housed elsewhere. Rates for transients are absurdly high considering the service rendered. Charges for resident employees are excessive in view of the fact that quarters are free elsewhere. Employees visiting the Tivoli transiently pay exorbitant prices.

The barracks of the European laborers, including Greeks, Italians and Spaniards, and of the West Indians are identical in construction, each house being one large dormitory, containing 60 to 72 or 84 cots. The air space is not always equal to the requirement in modern tenement house laws. There is no furniture, what ever on which to sit in the common laborers' dormitories when changing clothes or when it rains daytime.

The laborers, as well as the Americans, are required to buy blankets, and consequently few of the former have them. The principal malady from which the laborers suffer is pneumonia.

Baths.

The cold shower bath has been introduced generally for all employees. In exceptional cases tub baths have been installed in family quarters, but only there is it feasible to have hot water secured by utilizing cook stoves.

Movable bath tubs should be sold at the commissaries for women and children. All men cannot endure the cold shower bath, for it chills them, especially if over-heated at the close of the day's work, when the bath is most needed, because mechanics, engineers and others desire to remove shop grease.

It is common to hear the expression, "If I could not holler, I would not be able to get a morning bath!" There should be some special bath houses equipped with hot water for American bachelors and it should be supplied in those of the laborers.

Shortage of Furniture.

There are dissatisfaction among American bachelors who were sleeping upon cots. All were promised beds, but many had not yet received them. Families who had been there a year had not yet received their full quota of furniture.

While it is generally conceded that there always will be grumblers, no matter how great is the attempt to be fair in assigning quarters and furniture, many of the conditions existing to-day are certainly unnecessary. It is to be hoped that the Army method of purchasing, now being adopted, with the larger corps of inspectors to follow up orders and urge deliveries, may aid in relieving the situation.

There must be a poor system of inspection of materials for types ordered are not received. For instance, copper screen is required in that most climate, where everything rusts, and yet iron screen has been received largely.

Drying Rooms Needed.

The airing of garments and bed clothing, which soon becomes moldy and musty, is constantly necessary in the wet season. The housewife may dry the garments of the husband at the kitchen stove, but the bachelor has the greatest hardship, for he has no means of drying his wet clothing after being at work in the rain daily eight months in the year.

One of the greatest causes of illness among the laborers is the placing of damp clothes upon the warm body in the morning, chilling it.

Vermine.

Bed bugs exist to such an extent as to cause serious discomfort. A man cannot be in a contented frame of mind at work after suffering from vermin at night.

Cockroaches and fleas are numerous in the quarters and flies are exceedingly troublesome in the mess halls.

The subject of eradicating vermin in the tropics should receive such scientific consideration as has been directed towards pests which have annoyed farmers.

One of the contributions of the United States to the Panamanian Government for the privilege of constructing the Canal was the paving of

the streets in the cities of Panama and Colon.

A sewerage system has been installed from one end of the isthmus to the other, and water for all purposes, bathing and drinking, for the majority of the camps, is furnished by four reservoirs.

The water supply grew very scarce toward the end of the dry season, but the increase in the capacity of the reservoirs will, it is expected, obviate that inconvenience next year. It will take a year to finish making all the connections in the water and sewer systems and to complete the extensions of pipes to new camps, but there will be no serious inconvenience.

The water is quite offensive for drinking unless boiled or distilled.

Electric Light.

The electric light system was completed two months before the time of this investigation, some of the camps having all the houses wired and are lights in the streets. The electric light plant is to be developed further. It is important that streets in all villages should be so lighted in the interest of morality. There is no twilight and when there is no moonlight, the darkness is dense.

The meals which were eaten at the mess halls for Americans and laborers were good, but there was every reason to believe from the testimony offered that the majority were especially prepared.

When Col. Goethals began his trip of investigation in March the last of the food at the mess halls was had with one exception. There was dissatisfaction because the sum of \$37,000 was cleared on food last year and good food was not supplied. Col. Goethals has insisted that a ten-cent meal shall not be sold for thirty cents, which is the price charged the Americans.

The mess houses for American bachelors are attractive. There are separate rooms with table linen for those who come directly from work places who may eat in their shirt sleeves, the tables being covered with white oil cloth so that shop grease may readily be washed from it. Dishes are good, but silver is of a very cheap grade.

Messes for Common Laborers.

The European laborers are fed in separate mess halls, which are splendidly arranged, the dining-rooms containing uncovered tables and benches for seats. Enamelled ware of the appearance of granite makes an excellent type of dishes. Italians, Greeks and Spaniards have their tastes consulted and their favorite foods are furnished. Meals are furnished at forty cents a day, gold. They are allowed to take their little bottles of light wine, which they are accustomed to have with meals, to the mess halls.

The West Indians, until the first of February, cooked their own food in any sort of fashion, in tents on the ground, at their barracks. Owing to malnutrition and illness resulting therefrom, it was decided to erect cook houses and prepare their food, which is now made a part of their wages.

There should be a very rigid examination of food supplies before being shipped from the United States. It is inconceivable that any one should be asked to drink coffee or to eat spoiled eggs and meat as are now supplied. One of the most urgent recommendations is that the Agricultural Department be called upon to promote farming on the isthmus in order to meet the great need of fresh vegetables, milk, chickens, eggs and fruit. Almost anything can be grown upon the isthmus. During the dry season there can be irrigation. No one can know what it means to be deprived of fresh vegetables until obliged to subsist upon canned foods altogether. Then an onion, a cucumber or a radish is indeed a luxury.

Commissaries.

The main Commissary is located at Colon, and there are local branches at the largest camps. There are dry goods, grocery and laundry departments, an ice plant and a bakery in connection therewith.

In the dry goods department there was a lack of shoes, shirts, overalls, underwear, rain coats and other goods which would be desired by American workmen.

Shirts and overalls purchased during the investigation are of very coarse materials and wretchedly manufactured. A dress-suit case bought by a man just leaving for his vacation for \$25.20 was found to be paste-board covered with thin skins. When the undertaker to buckle the strap it tore out. All would be willing to pay higher prices than are now charged to get satisfactory articles of merchandise. Good toilet articles are sold, but otherwise it is seldom that anything wanted by the employees can be secured and therefore they must buy large quantities of clothing when taking vacations in the United States.

The principal complaint against the Commissary Department is that meats are not always received in good condition.

There are two laundries, one at Colon and one at Ancon, equipped with modern appliances. Clothes were laundered before their establishment entirely by native women, who beat their garments upon rocks in the rivers, causing them to be torn.

The refrigeration plant for the manufacturing of ice is a splendid structure. This commodity is sold to the employees being delivered daily. There is complaint about short weight. The bakery contains modern machinery. While the bread is regarded as "good" by the employees, it could be much improved. No money is allowed to be taken by the managers of commissaries for purchases. Employees' commissary books just as they do meal books from time keepers, and make their payments with coupons in different denominations.

Hospitals.

The main hospitals at each end of the isthmus are splendidly equipped. The men speak enthusiastically of their treatment. At the various camps there are dispensaries and receiving rooms. There are also rest camps for common laborers who are not very ill, but who would be more

comfortable in beds with mattresses and bed clothes than in their barracks on cots without covering. There are wife cages in which suspect cases are placed until it can be learned whether or not the disease is yellow fever. The object is to prevent the carrying of contagion, by mosquitoes, from such patients to others. There had not been a case of yellow fever for a year and a half until the first of July, when one was landed at the City of Panama from a boat which had made a stop at a port in the Pacific Ocean, where the disease existed. Employees are treated free. Quinine is offered to all daily at the messes. The principal ailments are malaria, pneumonia and typhoid fever. The highest mortality is among the negroes.

Although malarial fever is far more fatal to blacks than to whites, mosquito netting is not furnished the former, while it is given free to the latter.

Rain Sheds Needed.

Where excavating work is being carried on there should be constructed rain sheds in which employees might keep coats and to which they could retire during heavy showers. Then the men become thoroughly wet. This not only threatens health, but if it occurs mornings the men go to their quarters and do not return afterwards, causing delay in the work.

In some of the camps there are small clubrooms above the mess halls containing billiard and pool tables and dancing halls. They are used and supported by voluntary camps there are handsome club buildings, under the management of the Young Men's Christian Association. These buildings are surrounded by wide, screened verandas; each contains billiard, pool, smoking and lounging rooms, a bowling alley, gymnasium library and a hall for dancing and other entertainments. There are limited opportunities for baseball, tennis, boating and horseback riding.

Comparatively few are provided with recreation Sunday, the one day free for relaxation. There should be started a large amusement park, a Coney Island scheme. There could be a hall for dancing, racing track for ponies, with archery and golf croquet inside, a circus ring, bowling alleys, shooting galleries, a small theatre, side shows and a shanty for resting. There should be shelters for resting and for light lunches. Such a scheme undoubtedly can be made a private enterprise.

A stock company with good talent should be induced to go to the isthmus to provide theatrical performances, which would be greatly appreciated.

One need is the organization of women's clubs, with definite objects. A canal zone federation of women's clubs could be allied with the general federation in the United States. Such clubs could organize into "Ladies Aid Societies," to take an interest in public schools, in the entertainment of patients at the hospitals, in organizing bureaus for mending bachelors' garments, children's playgrounds and centres for securing servants.

Schools.

Schools have been established for whites at only five of the camps, but for blacks at most of them. Inability to educate their children has caused competent men to return to the States, deterred others from taking employment on the isthmus and there are those who have had to separate their families, leaving the older children at home in private schools or with relatives. The objects of instruction so far has been merely to keep the children from falling behind the grades in which they were when leaving the States.

The Commission has decided to improve the school system by securing teachers through civil service appointments. Family life has become a fixed thing upon the isthmus, and it is imperative that, even though it may be but for a matter of ten years, the Department of Education should be scientifically organized. It is likely, however, that there will be a permanent result, perchance for some European race as a basis, for the protection of the Canal when completed.

The Government has constructed in every large camp attractive two-story buildings for church services and lodge meetings. Ten chaplains of different denominations are employed in the hospitals.

Regulation of the Liquor Traffic.

The liquor traffic is strictly supervised in the Canal Zone, the number of licenses having been reduced from over two hundred to thirty-four.

The testimony of laborers, officials, wives of employees, physicians and secretaries of the Young Men's Christian Association prove conclusively that vice and intoxication are no more extensive in that place than in any other territory. There is drinking, and it is a curse, just as it is everywhere, but there is no more orderly community in the world than the Canal Zone. While it would be desirable to have prohibition, that is impossible, for there are those who will have liquor, and it can be had in Panamanian territory and carried into the Zone. There is no doubt but that, as a temperance measure, good beer and wines, at proper rates, should be provided in the men's clubs under supervision.

Savings.

The large number of drafts and money orders sent home by employees indicate that money is saved more generally than foolishly spent. During the last fiscal year two million dollars were forwarded in money leave money from their quarters by postal orders at the rate of thirty cents for one hundred dollars. There should be some system of savings, enabling employees to receive interest instead of having to pay their employees, the Government, to care for their savings.

Labor Conditions.

The majority of the employees work more than eight hours, and do not come under the operation of the Eight Hour law. A long work day is undesirable in that climate, but many work twelve and fourteen hours. There is a strange lack of uniformity in the matter of vacation and sick

leaves. Certain men in the employ of the Panama Railway Company have vacation with pay and unlimited sick leave, while the same type of men engaged directly under the Isthmian Canal Commission must take vacations without pay and have their sick leave limited. American employees paid by the month are granted vacations, with pay, but monthly men who are not Americans get none. Again, employees of the Panama Railroad Company on the isthmus receive vacations, but the same line do not. It is alleged that men paid by the hour receive extra pay for overtime work, and that monthly men do not, and, therefore, it is fair that the latter should receive pay when on vacation, although it is denied the former. However, since the employees are allowed a vacation because physicians consider an annual change of climate essential for the average man not accustomed to work in a tropical climate, it would seem that vacations with pay should be allowed all Americans, especially as hourly men in the navy yards in the United States are so privileged.

There is intense feeling among certain hourly men that they have greater skill than some classes which have been recently awarded increase of wages. There has been adopted recently a longevity plan, which provided a certain percentage of increase of pay each year for twenty-four types of employees. There is dissatisfaction because it has not been made applicable to others, especially powder men engaged in dangerous work.

The men feel that there is no stability, because rules are constantly changed. There are improvements in the new regulations which took effect July 1, an especially generous provision allowing mechanics time and one-half in addition to regular pay for holidays. But "the straw which broke the camel's back" is the one providing for wholesale discharge of all employees at the end of their next leave periods, to bring everyone under the same rules. This is regarded as a breaking of contracts by the government.

There is no general discrimination against unions on the isthmus, but there is a strong anti-union sentiment among officials and an unwillingness to deal with union committees, which has caused dissatisfaction and seems inconsistent in view of the fact that Secretary Taft meets the national officials of the same organizations and confers with them relative to the conditions of their men upon the isthmus.

The President has removed one long standing cause of irritation by ordering the hours of mechanics to be made identical—i. e., eight hours. But the situation is so complicated that it would be impossible to equalize conditions unless a careful study were made by an expert labor commissioner whose sole duty would be the consideration of labor matters.

A Canal Newspaper Desirable.

There should be published in English, Spanish, Italian and Greek, a weekly bulletin similar to those of many private employers. Through such a channel the Canal Zone news would be conveyed to employees who would be less discontented when notified that disasters rather than inattention are the cause of discomforts. For instance there would be published the loss of a ship containing vegetables or of a shipload of lumber, both of which occurred during the investigation, and changes in rulings with reference to mess houses, the reduction of prices at commissaries and other improvements. This paper could be supplied with the Associated Press dispatches, furnishing employees, eager for news from home, pleasant diversion.

Transportation Service.

The Panama Railroad Company owned by the government, operates a line of steamships between New York and Colon. The condition under which the employees are transported to and from the isthmus are simply intolerable.

The boats are overcrowded, some scarcely poorly ventilated and badly located, the food is awful and some of the ships are unsafe. It is not too much to say that both, with reference to the treatment of the Isthmian canal employees and the attendants of the boats, the steamship service is a disgrace to the nation.

The transportation service upon the isthmus is necessarily limited, as numerous passenger trains would interfere with excavation work. Attractive stations have been built by the government at the various camps. Improvement in terminal facilities are necessary, and now that there are so many married women upon the zone, smoking should be limited to one car. There might be constructed a street railway line in connection with the proposed amusement park.

It is to the interest of the enterprise that needed reforms be expeditiously introduced, for whatever can be done to maintain a competent and permanent force of employees will be a contribution to the efficiency of the work.

An Old Suffolk Fish Story.

Shingle street is some seven miles from Oxford, where the fine old Norman tower still remains in which, according to Ralph de Coggeshall, a strange creature was once incarcerated. We are told "that in the year 1180, near unto Oxford, in Suffolk, certain fishers took in their nets a fish having the shape of a wild man in all points. He had hair on his head and a long picked beard, and about the breast was exceeding hairy and rough, which fish was kept by Bartholomew de Glanville, the governor, in the castle of Oxford six months or more. He spake not a word. All manner of meats did he gladly eat, but most greedily raw fish. Oftentimes he was brought to church, but never showed any sign of adoration. At length, being not well looked to, he stole to the sea and never was seen after."—London Saturday Review.

The Vicar—Do you give your dog any exercise, Mr. Hodge?
Farmer Hodge—Oh, yes. He goes for a tramp nearly every day.—Tit-Bits.



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